

USA \$1.25/CANADA \$1.60

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MAY 22, 1995

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Melvin Van Peebles

**Father-Son
Duo
Team
Up To Make
New Movie**

Mario Van Peebles

64060



64060 A JOHNSON PUBLICATION

'Panther'

Father-Son Duo Team Up To Make New Movie



Filmmaking duo Mario and Melvin Van Peebles made the action-packed drama Panther. Mario directed the film and Melvin wrote the screenplay. They co-produced the film.

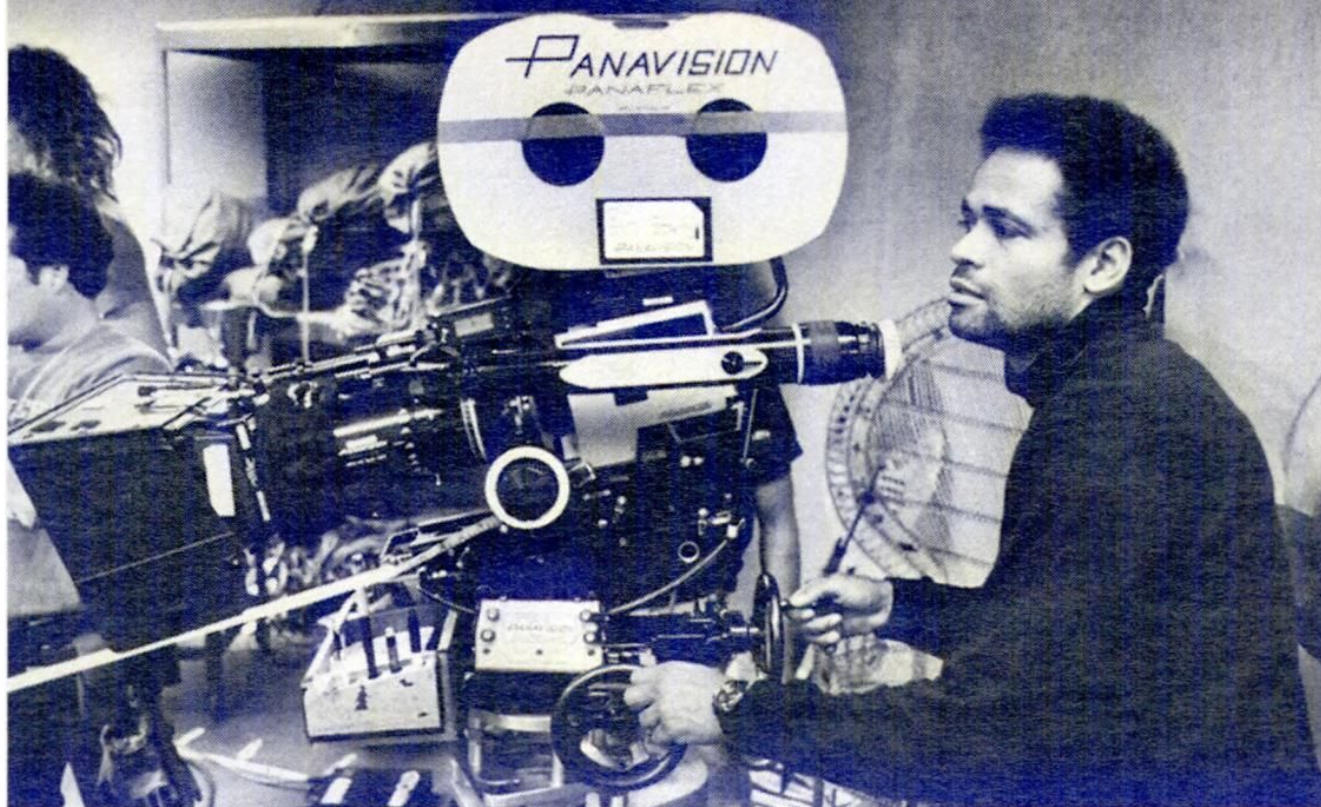
'PANTHER'



Father and son filmmakers Melvin Van Peebles and Mario Van Peebles have teamed up to bring moviegoers a revealing look into the 1960s' Black Panther Party in the new movie, *Panther*.

Panther dramatizes the Black Panther Movement which began in 1966 in Oakland, CA. It is a fictionalized version set

◀ *Founding members of the Black Panther Party For Self-Defense Bobby Seale, played by actor Courtney B. Vance (l), and Huey Newton, played by Marcus Chong, keep watch in front of Panther headquarters.*



▲ Director Mario Van Peebles sizes up a shot on the set of *Panther*. Mario previously directed the hit movies *New Jack City* and *Posse*. His father Melvin Van Peebles, a trail-blazing filmmaker, gained fame with his 1970 film *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*.

against real-life events that occurred during the Black Panthers' rise to prominence in the '60s.

Panther was directed by Mario Van Peebles and written by Melvin Van Peebles and is based on his novel. The father and son team also co-produced the powerful new film, along with Preston Holmes.

The father and son duo say working together was a real joy.

"I'm dealing with the person who changed my diapers," Mario joked during an interview with the N.Y. Daily News. "We're two different filmmakers, but I think that is healthy."

To that his proud father Melvin said, "He's getting better and bet-

ter...he's getting closer to me."

In the movie, a Vietnam vet (Judge) played by actor Kadeem Hardison returns home to Oakland and is impressed and a little intimidated by what he sees. Judge eventually joins the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense.

The Black Panther Party was

► Kadeem Hardison (l) plays Judge, a Vietnam vet, and Jennifer Lewis plays his mother. Both characters are drawn into the Panther movement in the film.





▲ Rap star Nefertiti makes her film debut as Alma—a strong Black woman who becomes a dedicated and outspoken member of the Panthers. Up-and-coming actor Bokeem Woodbine (r) plays tough-minded and heroic Tyrone, one of the leaders of the Panther group.

founded by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, who are portrayed in the movie by actors Marcus Chong and Courtney B. Vance, respectively.

Armed with a knowledge of the law and the passion to help their Black community, Newton and Seale and their Panther Party monitor police activities.

The talented cast also includes Bokeem Woodbine, rapper Nefertiti and veteran comedian-activist Dick Gregory, who portrays a minister and community leader. Melvin Van Peebles has a cameo appearance in the

movie, while Mario appears briefly as activist Stokely Carmichael. Also featured are comedian-actor Chris Rock and soul singer Bobby Brown who are featured as two of the neighborhood residents.

The *Panther* soundtrack boasts such recording stars as Bobby Brown, Aaron Hall, Shanice, Sounds of Blackness and Tony, Toni Tone. The first single from *Panther Freedom* features a group of women performers including Vanessa Williams, Queen Latifah, Salt-n-Pepa, Mary J. Blige, TLC, Lalah Hathaway, Patra and others.

Panther is the brainchild of Melvin Van Peebles, who captures the essence of the Panther movement in his



◀ Mario and his father Melvin are joined by former Black Panther David Hilliard (r) and Fredricka Newton (2nd, l), the widow of Huey Newton, during a bash at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences in Beverly Hills.

novel, which he worked on over the past 15 years and is a reflection of his firsthand contact with the movement.

Van Peebles, though never a party member himself, travelled in the same politically active circles and knew the Panthers' top leaders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.

His 1970 film, *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song*, which he wrote, directed and starred in, was a favorite among Panther members.

"My film, *Sweet Sweetback*, was made mandatory viewing for the Panthers by Huey," said Melvin, who lent his financial support to the Panthers via benefit concerts. He remembers Newton saying: "*Sweet Sweetback* blows my mind every time I talk about it because it's so simple and yet so profound."

Panther also is the completion of a circle for the younger Van Peebles. "In one of his pieces about my dad's film, *Sweet Sweetback*, Huey Newton wrote about a child actor in the movie. That kid was me. And now

I'm directing a film about the movement that he and Bobby Seale founded."

Co-producer Preston Holmes was attracted to *Panther* because it is an entertaining and vivid story about "everyday people who saw a situation, analyzed it and decided to do something about it."

He added, "This film is not a documentary. What we hope to do in a dramatic and entertaining way is to make a connection between what's important in the minds of young people today with what was going on back in the formative days of the Panthers. These were young people—most of them in their teens and early 20s—who set out to change conditions in their communities, in their country."

Mario says he hopes viewers will want to learn more about the Black Panther Party. "Some folks will go to this film, they'll say, 'Is any of this true?' and they'll run out and buy a book. If it encourages them to read at all, that's positive."



◀ Mario Van Peebles is accompanied by U.S. Representative and former Black Panther Bobby Rush (D-IL) as they enter Planet Hollywood restaurant in Chicago to donate items from the new movie. Rush expressed approval of the movie.